DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Acting Secretary

FROM: HA - Patricia M. Derian

The Non-Governmental Community's Recommendations for Strengthening U.S. Human Rights Policy

In a series of discussions by Roberta Cohen of HA with leading human rights organizations, the following perceptions and recommendations emerged. The groups included: Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, the International League for Human Rights, Freedom House, the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, the UNA-USA, the Washington International Human Rights Law Group, Internet, the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, the B'nai B'rith International, the United States Catholic Conference, the American Jewish Committee, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Council of Hemispheric Affairs, the American Association of Publishers, and Khronika Press. Without an attempt to screen, the following are their views:

I. Perceptions: NGO's, while strongly supportive of the policy and the establishment and activities of the Human Rights Bureau, are deeply disturbed by what they perceive as the policy's declining visibility. The following was cited as evidence of a clear backing away from strong human rights advocacy:

-- The failure of the Executive Branch to strongly work for the ratification of the Genocide Convention, International Covenants and other human rights agreements.

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-- The uneven application of the policy. When security or economic interests are involved, human rights are ignored.

-- The absence of anyone in the White House or National Security Council strongly supportive of human rights.

-- The continued insensitivity to and lack of knowledge about human rights by many foreign service officers here and abroad.

-- Diminishing U.S. pressure on major violators, in particular South Korea, Argentina, Indonesia, Nicaragua, the Philippines, South Africa, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rhodesia (Freedom House excepted on Rhodesia).

II. Recommendations: Because the Executive Branch is viewed as having passed through its "human rights phase," "triumphs" were said to be needed to demonstrate the importance of the policy and to make clear that it was not on the wane but on a new plateau.

The triumph that virtually all NGO's recommended was ratification of the human rights treaties. Specifically, NGO's urged intensive Executive Branch "lobbying" with the Senate to ensure prompt passage of the Genocide Convention and recommended that the Secretary formally request the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold hearings on the Covenants.

Other recommendations were:

-- A major speech by a high-level USG official (Christopher, Vance, Brzezinski, or Carter) realistically setting forth the future direction of the policy and its accomplishments and setbacks to date.

-- The appointment of a human rights advocate to the White House and National Security Council.

-- The enlargement of the Human Rights Bureau to enable its adequate handling of the enormous task before it.

-- A massive foreign service education program aimed at institutionalizing the teaching of human rights as a regular feature of foreign service training.

-- A vigorous effort to enlist Congressional support for human rights issues.

-- Provision of strong support and encouragement to countries with good human rights records and those in which major advances have occurred.

-- The clear reflection in U.S. aid patterns of an alliance with democratic nations or those in which such processes are developing.

-- The re-formulation of the human rights policy to include: a) Greater attention to the promotion of civil and political liberties and democratic institutions. (The policy to date, it was noted, had been implemented with prime focus on first category rights); b) A clearer statement of the correlation, or lack of, between economic and social and civil and political rights and how U.S. policy could promote both. (It was noted that countries which respected civil and political liberties did not necessarily promote economic and social rights); c) An evaluation of U.S. obligations under the proposed New International Economic Order; d) A clear statement on how U.S. military sales and aid impacted on human rights; and e) A clear definition of the kinds of police equipment the U.S. was sending abroad and how this impacted on human rights.

-- The maintenance of a tough human rights stance toward major violators, in particular, Argentina and Nicaragua (where the USG is perceived as having backed down), the Philippines, South Korea (where the President's forthcoming visit was strongly criticized, particularly in the absence of any known commitments by the South Korean Government to improve its record prior to or in conjunction with the visit), South Africa, El Salvador, Guatemala, Rhodesia and Indonesia. In the case of the USSR and CSCE, the following recommendations were made: the designation at an early stage of an Ambassador and a task force for Madrid to give focus to the forthcoming meeting; the inclusion of human rights questions on the summit agenda; the undertaking of efforts to improve phone and mail communication with the USSR; a review of the programs broadcast by Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America to ensure their adequate reflection of human rights concerns; and the adoption by the U.S. Embassy of a more open attitude toward contacts with unofficial Soviets.

-- At the UN, the appointment of an individual of stature and expertise to represent the U.S. at the UN Human Rights Commission and other human rights bodies; and a more responsive position on Southern Africa, economic rights and the human rights implications of the NIEO.

-- The revision of immigration policies to make them less restrictive geographically and more responsive in political asylum cases. In addition, the facilitation of the granting of visas to communist party members for visits.

-- More outreach: NGO's requested that the Department inform them more quickly about changes in human rights conditions and consult them more frequently during "the process of making a decision." They in particular requested to be informed about pending decisions in the Christopher Committee or other fora (where private business and foreign government pressures come into play) so that their views can be considered.

Drafted by: HA/HR:RCohen:bdr
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Concurrence: HA:MLSchneider
HA/HR:CBSalmon, Jr.